‘Open Dialogue’ the topic as international psychotherapy pioneer visits NBMLHD

A visit by Professor Jaakko Seikkula was hosted by NBMLHD Mental Health Services along with Mountains Community Resource Network and supported by Blue Mountains City Council last month.

Over 120 people attended the forum held in Katoomba, and 19 Mental Health Service managers and senior clinicians participated in a three-hour evening masterclass with Professor Seikkula. Jaako Seikkula, Professor of Psychotherapy at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, is a member of the team which developed the ‘Open Dialogue’ approach to respond to the needs of people in crisis experiencing a psychotic episode or contemplating suicide.

General Manager, NBMLHD Mental Health Services, Alison Sneddon, said:

“The approach certainly seems to complement our emerging person-centred model of care and recovery-orientated approach. It may enable the consumer, their family, support people, our service and broader community to better understand their health care needs and safety issues, and develop more effective ways of working with people who experience mental health problems.”

“It appears to have achieved results and improved mental health outcomes that we are interested in. We are exploring the possibility of introducing this approach or key components within NBMLHD Mental Health Services.”

The Open Dialogue approach emerged as part of a national Finnish research project more than 30 years ago. The starting point of the new program was to build a community-based care system that avoided hospitalisation as much as possible with a strong focus on dialogue and active listening. This approach, in which the family and others close to the person in crisis are gathered together to help find new understandings of the crisis situation, seems to reliably lead to reduced anxiety, distressing symptoms and social breakdown.

The approach appears to have proven so effective in Seikkula’s home country of Finland that mental health professionals around the globe are starting to look into the possibility of implementing it.

Open Dialogue has recently been adopted by Mental Health Services in New York, Belgium and Germany.

The Nepean Blue Mountains visit was a special event and one of only two regional visits made by Professor Seikkula during his time in Australia.

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